Praying Like a Faithful Citizen

Our action as Faithful Citizens should flow from prayer. When we pray, we experience God and we remember that he is in us and in all people, who are created in his image and have inherent dignity. If we want to truly be faithful citizens, we must know how to come to God in prayer, experience God in ourselves and others, and listen to the ways God is calling us to respond.

Nine New Ways to Pray

Try out all of these ways to pray as a Faithful Citizen as well as other creative ideas you might think of. Then try the ones that work best for you again and again – make them a practice in your daily life so that you can be a just pray-er and a faithful citizen!

The Newspaper Prayer: Look through a print or online newspaper to find a news article about an issue mentioned in Faithful Citizenship. Cut out (or print out) the article and bring it with you to a quiet place where you can pray. Think about how human dignity is affected by the issue or situation. Pray for God's healing and transformation for all people impacted, lawmakers, and citizens like yourself. Ask God how he is asking you to respond to this issue.

Becoming a Character in the Parables: Read slowly *one* of the following Gospel readings: John 5:1-15; Luke 8:40-56; Mark 1:40-45; or Mt. 20:29-34. Then read it again, imagining that you are the character in the story with whom Jesus interacts. Imagine how it would be to be in that character's place. How do you feel before you meet Jesus? How do you feel physically (what do all five senses experience in that time and place?), emotionally, and spiritually? What happens when you encounter Jesus? What is that experience like? Imagine every detail of the story. Next, imagine the story again in your mind, but this time, substitute a modern-day person, for example, someone who is homeless or a person who is sick with cancer or AIDS but has no health insurance. Let this exercise lead you into prayer for the real people who are suffering in the world. Pray for justice and for realization of your role in making justice a reality.

F.C. Journaling: Read slowly the following quote from Faithful Citizenship and write in your prayer journal about what strikes you about the quote and how it relates to you personally. Pray for understanding and the grace to respond to God's call.

> 9. The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ, who offers a vision of life revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. To echo the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: Christ, the Word made flesh, in showing us the Father's love, also shows us what it truly means to be human (see *Gaudium et Spes,* no. 22). Christ's love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us. Christ, the Teacher, shows us what is true and good, that is, what is in accord with our human nature as free, intelligent beings created in God's image and likeness and endowed by the Creator with dignity and rights as well as duties.
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> 10. What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person, about the sacredness of every human life, and about humanity's strengths and weaknesses helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square. We are called to practice Christ's commandment to "love one another" (Jn 13:34). We are also called to promote the well-being of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the voiceless. In his first encyclical letter, Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI explained that "charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as 'social charity'" (no. 29).

A.C.T.S.: This acronym stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. You can use the acronym to help you pray for issues you care about and for help in acting as a faithful citizen.

Adoration: Praise God for his love for humanity, and for creating each human being with dignity. Express wonder for life and beauty, and the basic goodness of human beings.

Confession: Express your sorrow for an issue – a collective or social sin of humanity – that is facing the world today. This could include poverty, abortion, environmental destruction, or another issue mentioned in Faithful Citizenship. Take a moment to also recognize how you may have participated in the collective sin or issue, perhaps by your failure to do something about it.

Thanksgiving: Thank God for his forgiveness and for maintaining hope in the world and in humans despite our failures. Express thanks for the talents that God has given humans and the inspiration to use these talents to address issues like the one you have mentioned.

Supplication: Supplication is another word for intercession, or asking. Ask God to help bring about a positive solution to the issue you have identified – for an end to the social injustice. Ask him to help you see how you are called to be involved in addressing the issue. Invite the Spirit into your heart to inspire you.

The Map Prayer: On a map or globe, pick a country with which you are not very familiar. Visit the USCCB website or the Catholic Relief Services map page to read about issues that might be impacting those countries. Spend some quiet prayer time praying for the people in those countries.

Just Listening: For many of the holiest people in history, listening was a major part of their prayer. To practice Just Listening, find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for 10-15 minutes. Sit or kneel in a comfortable, upright position. Take several deep breaths and be aware of the air coming in and out of your lungs and notice the quiet around you. Ask God what he would like to tell you and the world about the social issues you are concerned about. Try to sense God's love and other feelings for you, your community and the world. You may wish to sit in stillness, or you might try writing down what you think God might be saying to you and to your community/world.

The Old Testament Prophets and You: In a quiet place where you will not be disturbed, read slowly one of the following readings from the Old Testament: Jer. 1:4-10 and 22:1-3; or Is. 58. In silence, prayerfully consider the following questions: What stands out to you about the reading? What was God saying to his people through the prophet? What might the reading mean for the world today? Are you open to being a modern day prophet? What message might God be calling you to proclaim? Ask God to be with you and to guide you as you reflect on these questions. Pray for the strength to respond to whatever God might be asking of you.

The Prayer Box: Using a shoe box or another similarly-sized box, create your own personal prayer box. You may choose to cover your box with paper or decorate it in some way, or you can simply leave it plain. On small slips of paper, write issues about which you are concerned as a Faithful Citizen. You might choose some issues from *Faithful Citizenship* (e.g. death penalty, euthanasia, war, etc.). Put the papers inside the box. During your prayer time each day, pick one or two slips of paper out of the box and pray for those impacted by injustices related to the issues, for policymakers, and for the ability to listen to how God might be calling you to respond.

The Service Prayer: Seeing God in the poor and vulnerable can help move you to work for justice. Make a special effort to arrange to spend time with a vulnerable population – for example, you could visit the elderly in a nursing home or serve food at a homeless shelter. Before you serve, ask God to be with you and to help you to recognize his presence in every person with whom you interact. During your service, be especially attentive to God's presence in each person you serve, and the dignity that is in each of them. You might want to try saying a short prayer before you speak with different persons or serve food (for example, "God, be with this person who is made in your image"). After your service time is over, go to a quiet place and think about the ways you saw God in each person. Try to remember details about individuals that you met. Ask for God's blessing on each and then ask God how he might be calling you to work to address the root causes of the challenges they face.